DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 470 937 CE 084 123

AUTHOR	Daniels, Doria
TITLE	Using the Life Histories of Community Builders in an Informal Settlement To Advance the Emancipation and Development of Women.
PUB DATE	2002-05-00
NOTE	16p.; In: "The Cyril O. Houle Scholars in Adult and Continuing Education Program Global Research Perspectives: Volume 2" compiled by Ronald M. Cervero, Bradley C. Courtenay and Catherine H. Monaghan, May 2002.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.coe.uga.edu/hsp/monographs2/daniels.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Education; At Risk Persons; Biographies; Blacks; Data Collection; Empowerment; *Females; Foreign Countries; Housing; Interviews; *Leaders; Multilingualism; *Participatory Research; *Personal Narratives; Photography; Popular Education; Power Structure; *Research Methodology; Womens Education
IDENTIFIERS	Emancipatory Education; Marginalized Groups; Narrative Inquiry; Researcher Subject Relationship; *South Africa

ABSTRACT

South African women in informal settlements lack access to education and employment opportunities, making them vulnerable to exploitation and poverty. A collaborative narrative inquiry was undertaken to compile the life histories of 16 women, identifying their participation in community building. The process combined popular education and feminist pedagogy. An indigenous multilingual interview model was developed and used with the assistance of translators. Multiple languages and researchers provided a way to control for miscommunication. Analysis of photographs and drawings was another means of strengthening the validity of the data. The life stories collected were used during workshops on community building, entrepreneurship, and women's health and rights, which took place in the context of a volatile community dispute over permanent housing. The dialectic process in which the women exchanged ideas and shared experiences was empowering. The interview model bridged the distance between researcher and research subjects, neutralizing their unequal relationship. The research design, focused on participants' voices, was unique in South African adult education research. The life histories of these community leaders illuminated the experiences of invisible or marginalized groups. Through continuous reflection, the researcher's views, beliefs, and attitudes were challenged and changed. (Contains 25 references.) (SK)

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Doria Daniels

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Using the Life Histories of Community Builders in an Informal Settlement to Advance the Emancipation and Development of Women

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This study presents a critical reflection on the vulnerability of both the researcher and the researched when an at risk population coping with sensitive issues was researched. In this study of the lives of women who are living in an unsettled, informal environment, the suitability and fit of existing research models to effectively access and reflect the multiple layers of the women's lived experiences came under scrutiny. In an attempt to privilege the women's experiences, multiple data collecting methods were incorporated in the research design. The synergetic relationship between interviews, observations, photography, and drawing as data collection methods are discussed within this specific context. The process of recording the lives of women as community builders in this African setting evolved as collaborative and challenging experiences for both researcher and researched. This is a report on collaborative research and the impact it had on the quality of the research results.

The South African constitution has gender equality as a fundamental principal (Poverty and Inequality Report, 1998), but the social perpetuation of the marginalisation of women continues. The lack of opportunities as well as the lack of recognition for the work that poor women do renders their contributions invisible and unappreciated. The triple roles as reproducer, producer and community workers that women in informal settlements fulfill become their daughters' duties and roles, (Moser, 1993), thereby continuing the circle of oppression and subordination of these women. Despite their low-income levels and bad economic conditions, many women make invaluable contributions to community building and development. However, due to certain traditions, customs, and practices they are seldom honoured for their accomplishments or accorded the right to meaningful decision-making processes within their communities. Women's participation in economic, political, social, and environmental decision-making processes need to increase for meaningful changes to take place in their personal lives.

The Issue/Problem

Black South African women's unequal educational access is being experienced as a major contributing factor to their being positioned at the lowest economic level, making them more vulnerable to exploitation and unemployment. They are functioning in a South Africa that is still patriarchal, and which affords men superior power and economic privilege. The consequences of patriarchy and poverty are much more devastating for those with less bargaining powers, such as semi-literate women. As a black South African woman, I recognize the importance of their voice from the view of my own life history. Compiling the life histories of women from Weiler's Farm was the first step in acknowledging the varying life experiences of marginalized poverty-stricken women. It was also an effort to celebrate the strengths of women as community builders and leaders. I propose that women's lives need to be featured as valid local knowledge in the means that bring education to them. When learning materials exclude them as knowledge makers, and the pedagogy disempowers them as learners and devalues their input and contributions as knowledge makers, then adult education serves to maintain the status quo. This approach resonates with Cervero and Wilson's (2001) third strand of adult education in which they describe the political as being structural, and adult education as a means of redistributing power. The process starts with women valuing their own as well as other woman's contributions

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first. Once the value of what women do is recorded and internalised by them, women show greater appreciation for the importance of gender regrouping, and start advocating and lobbying to advance women's cause within their community.

Initially, the women's experiences were to be reworked into materials for an adult basic education course. However, upon further reflection and supported by the needs analysis, it was decided instead to develop workshops in response to their community needs. These women's life stories were utilized in the workshops as tools of liberating some women participants from their multiple layers of imprisonment. Through self-exploration, critical thinking, and action of their ascribed and adopted roles in society, the women evaluated their roles and contributions to community building. Trueba (1999), states that when a researcher engages in critical ethnography, she makes the commitment to praxis and as such, integrates the research with emancipatory action, and this was what I hoped to accomplish with my work in Weiler's Farm.

Theoretical Framework

South African women who reside in informal settlements mostly live without access to development opportunities. This cycle is perpetuated and results in whole communities becoming unable to access opportunities offered by society, such as competing for better paying jobs and better living conditions. As African women, they are likely to experience discrimination and oppression in the private spheres of the home as well as the public spheres (Bernstein, 1985; Bozzoli, 1995; Cock, 1993). In the country, crimes against women are not given as much prominence as other political issues, and tend to be relegated to the status of domestic problems. In severely deprived communities, the situation is compounded by the adherence to traditional laws as well as the non-existence of formal legal structures. Even though the South African constitution ratified the CEDAW convention, women living in informal settlements are not reaping the benefits from these changes as they are caught in a web of poverty and patriarchy. Non-formal education (NFE) is an important vehicle to use in breaking these bonds. However, even when women participate strongly in NFE and create educational spaces they face obstacles in transforming these spaces into strains that go beyond their immediate surroundings. This results when NFE programs are unrelated to the lives of those who participate, and pedagogies are prescriptive instead of collaboratively driven (Daniels, 1998). It is also the result of education being approached as an a-political process, unaffected by oppressive societal structures such as patriarchy, sexism, racism, and classism. The framework for NFE that I embrace is one in which women become active protagonists of their transformation. It is one in which their accomplishments are recorded and used for critical analysis by them.

This study was grounded in women's learning and development and feminist ways of knowledge development. I found a combination of popular education and feminist pedagogy useful in my development of a framework for the inquiry. I used popular education to facilitate a process through which the women attained an advanced capacity for analysis, proposal, and response to the problems that affect them. The aims were to convert the historic challenges they face into goals with viable solutions, which, once undertaken, had the potential to lead to a quality protagonism projected in the Weiler's Farm community. I argue that these solutions could only come about once the women understand their own reality and the situation of women in general. Popular education begins by critically reflecting on, then sharing and articulating with the group what they already know from their lived experiences. This form of education is dependent on the participants' wisdom; its techniques are participative and all decision-making are collective processes. The methodology has its roots in Marxist theory, and was propagated by Paulo Freire (1992) through the processes of concientization and empowerment. My commitment to popular education techniques stems from the fact that "it values and respects people as their own experts, and challenges the notion that the educator or organizer's role is as an expert who works "for" people" (oneworld.org/cantera/education/index). As stated by the Cantera Popular Education and Communication Center, this pedagogy is carried out within a political vision that sees the subject, each woman, as the primary agent for social change.

Feminist literature propagates the critical reflection on how women's realities are studied (Arvay, 1998; Horsman, 1990; Johnson-Bailey, 1999). Underlying this was the position that I, the researcher adopted and this affected my construction of the ways to conduct research, especially in a setting as unsettled and thus unpredictable as Weiler's Farm. We became what Giroux refers to as border-crossers (Mayo, 1999), in many different ways. Each member of the research team had to cross the borders that demarcated her social locations

in order to understand the subjects, and the contexts in which they function. I share Gitlin's (1994), view that personal knowledge of the researched women and consideration of their self identified needs, which could differ because of differing economic and social locations (Horsman, 1990), were necessary for any effective planning of interventions to take place. Gender analysis is good development practice. Programming and development goals cannot be achieved without a clear understanding of the research population. This design also made provision for the educational journeys of the researchers as they collaborated with the women subjects.

On being black, woman, researcher and researched

The research process is a non-formal adult educational experience for everyone involved. My perspective is feminist, and my positioning is that of an educated black woman. Preparation for the research process raised my level of awareness of the challenges of cross-cultural research. Consequentially, methodology and epistemology became vital concerns because they impact various stages of cross-cultural research, starting with design. As human beings, we as researchers all bring to the setting our views, attitudes, and ways of thinking about inquiry, and it impacts on our thinking of research and design. Thus, it would have been a weakness in the design if the historical and social structural differences between the researchers and the subjects, which account for the difference in the range of options and choices available to us all, as women, were not tallied in as challenges to the research.

Critiquing the reality of women's diversity with regard to class, race and sexuality, is important for contemporary feminism (Daniels, 1998; Watt & Cook, 1991). Both the women researchers and the women researched are much more than just the expression of a formalist category: we are people who have lived and have accumulated life experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state that, "In formalist inquiry people, if they are identified at all, are looked at as exemplars of a form – of an idea, a theory, a social category. In narrative inquiry, people are looked at as embodiments of lived stories" (p. 43). The research team consisted of three black South African women who come from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. I grew up as a "Colored" in the Western Cape. Angela, a North-Sotho, grew up in Mpumalanga while Marie, a South-Sotho, grew up in Gauteng. Furthermore, we represent three different generations of women. The three of us, as formally educated women, entered the field relying on what Minnich (1990) refers to as partial knowledge, formed by our engagement with mainstream theories in our graduate studies. According to Sparks (1997), what this privileged perspectives does, is to restrict the researcher's view. She further states that it

> masks and promote exclusive traditions of what is called objective knowledge. Reliance on this partial, and so-called objective, knowledge has been at the expense of silencing voices of difference, which would challenge what is known in the mainstream. (p. 238)

An important challenge was the advancement of dialectic between researchers and researched. The most common assumption about communication is that when black women interview other black women, that their same gender and race will lead to a dialectic research environment for both researcher and researched and that 'there exists an immediate perceptive bond of sisterhood that provides an ideal research setting" (Johnson-Bailey, 1999, p. 659). Black South African women are members of the same race and gender, but we have differing degrees of power accrued to us because of our class and our perceived blackness. Though we, as educated black South African women might be moving toward the centre, the marginalization of semi-literate black women is continuing due to South Africa's class hierarchy. Though all black women who were born in South Africa might hold a common structure of oppression, our internal structures differ because they are fractured by differing life events and experiences. As anticipated, these unique internal structures presented differences as well as similarities between the three women on the research team as well as between the researchers and the subjects of the study. Feminists and critical theorists (Freire, 1992; Giroux, 1992; hooks, 1984; Horsman, 1990; Zambrana, 1994) have advocated for both the recognition of these differences as well as for the recognition of the significance of these differences, which necessitates the formulation of new theory to account for these differences. The author shares Zambrana's (1994) frustration with mainstream scholarship in understanding Latina women, when it comes to understanding poor African women. Though as poor women they might share similarities with other poor women, their individual lived experiences differ. So also, will their experiences, as women living in informal settlements be different from that of other poor African women living in formal settlements.

Data Collection and Analysis

A qualitative methodology was adopted for this research. I decided on the narrative as being the ideal methodological catalyst for placing experiences in their biological context (Parson, 1996). We asked the women to consciously think about their lives within the community, which appeared to be undervalued and taken for granted. Narrative inquiry is multi-layered and many stranded. Thus, in order to access the various layers of experiences, interviews, observation, photography, and drawing were selected as the methods to collect data to gain insight into the lives that informal settlement women lead. The insights guided the development of three workshops that the women participated in.

Making formal contact with the women who live in this informal settlement was difficult due to a lack of community information, municipal records, telephones, and permanent addresses for community members. The existing information on the community, as well as the list of names of people that we could contact to facilitate our entry to the field was useless to us because of a different communication network that was in place. A colleague of mine, who worked in this community before, suggested: "Oh, you visit the school. Just make sure that you take some cakes with." The local school turned out to be our best source of information because it is the centre of community activity, and the best link with the community members. Spending time at the school and in the community prior to starting the research was a good investment as we managed to establish a network, which, as the project developed, proved to be invaluable. Our first official invitation was to an AIDS awareness program at the school where we were introduced to community women who serve on the school governing body (SGB). They, in turn, introduced us to other women; thus, the sampling method used was the snowballing method. We considered every woman in the community to be representative of the theoretical population. The sixteen women who were subjects of the study were homemakers, volunteers, informal sector traders, and community workers. Though they are categorized according to their present identified worker role, they fluctuate between roles due to the instability of employment opportunities.

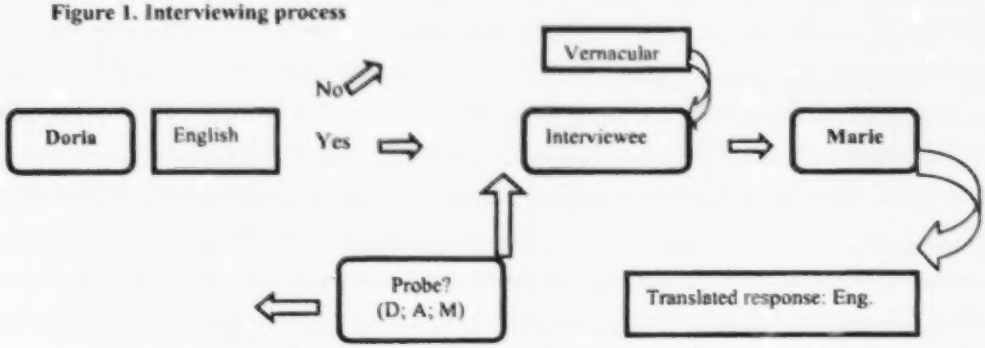
Interviewing in a multilingual context

The verbal linguistic competencies of black South Africans are diverse, with many being multilingual. Black South Africans on average speak four of the eleven official languages. For effective cross-cultural research to be conducted, language as communicative tool was vital to the quality of data to be collected. This necessitated the putting together of a research team that spoke most of the languages of the community. I anticipated that English and Afrikaans, the two (of eleven) official languages that I speak, would be a third or unfamiliar language for the subjects in this study. The linguistic capabilities of the two graduate students who were appointed as research assistants on the project, Marie and Angela, were vital to the success of the project. Angela speaks English, Sesotho, Setswana, Siswati, Xitsonga, and isiXhosa while Marie can converse in English, Sesotho, Setswana, isiZulu, and isiXhosa. My limited linguistic ability in this specific research setting, together with my different cultural and ethnic background had an impact on my perceived role on the team. During our first visit, Marie, who is a mature, confident black woman inadvertently took the lead. As the oldest member of the research team, she was accorded the respect enjoyed by older people in African black society. This served to establish the roles that the three of us took on in the interview process. We took our cue from Marie who dictated the etiquette of greeting and conducted the initial introductions with the women. Publicly Marie emulated the leadership role while Angela and my roles during the interview process were secondary ones.

The multilingual background of the women of Weiler's Farm necessitated that we design an indigenous multilingual interviewing model. We developed an interview guide that was in English, as well as in isiZulu and Sesotho, two dominant indigenous languages. The interviews were, however, conducted in a combination of languages, and not necessarily the three dominant languages. The following format was decided on: we would first ask the interviewee whether she understood English and/or Afrikaans, the two languages that used to be the official languages of South Africa. All sixteen women said that they understand at least one of these languages. Once we determined whether the interviewee had a working knowledge of English or Afrikaans, we would ask the interviewee what her preferred language of communication would be. Everyone selected an indigenous language, with many giving preference to Setswana, isiZulu, or isiXhosa. After the interviewee's language of communication was established, we started the interview. The interviewee's permission was sought to record the interview on audiotape. I would ask a question in English. If

the interviewee understood the question, she was requested to respond directly in the vernacular. If she did not understand the question, Angela asked the same question in the vernacular. She (the interviewee) would respond, upon which Marie would translate the response back to English. This process was decided on to allow for probing during this data extraction process. But this intervention was only possible if I knew how comprehensive the interviewee's response was, and whether the question was understood, based on how the interviewee responded to it. Angela and Marie, because of their fluency in the African languages, were more likely to pick up on the finer nuances and meanings of the interviewee's responses. As such, they had the freedom to probe and ask follow-up questions without my articulation. Figure 1 is a graphic depiction of this model of interviewing.

Figure 1. Interviewing process



This interview process was not without its own limitations or reservations. Due to my limited knowledge of the other South African languages, I initially had no immediate control over the probing (or lack of) and leading that was possible during this process. The relationship between the research team members became one of dependency in which we shared the responsibility of serving as the other's overseer and evaluator. As a form of translation control or verification, some of the earlier audio taped interviews were randomly selected for independent transcription and comparison.

During these interviews interesting dynamics developed between the researchers and the researched. As most of the responses to the questions were in the vernacular, which were mostly languages in which my competency stretched to single words and phrases, I also adopted the role of observer after I asked a question. What was interesting was how often the women used English and Afrikaans words in their responses, making it possible for me to get the gist of what was being said. Though most interviewees said that they spoke very little English, it was clear that their comprehension of English was good. Just like me, they could follow the translated English response to their answers. In the translation process, some of the women would often interject and correct or rephrase their response whilst Marie was providing the English translation. Often this process served the same purpose as probing because the women would rephrase a response and continue explaining or clarifying a previous response. This procedure would then lead to all four of us communicating to gain clarity on the subject's previous response. This dynamic was especially tangible when the subject could speak English as well. She would then also elaborate on her previous answer. The potential of this multilingual model, if used effectively, is that the subjects of the study are more likely to provide thick descriptions and detailed data on important aspects of their lives. Furthermore, the presence of multiple interviewers facilitates triangulation of methods as well as data. The usage of many languages and researchers worked complementary to each other as it provided a control mechanism for possible miscommunication, a tool that is not available in the one-on-one personal interview.

Advancing a collaborative ethos

Basic facilities and infrastructure in Weiler's Farm are absent and this called for innovative ways of doing the researcher, especially the interviews. Physical space was a luxury; thus finding a suitable place in the informal settlement to conduct the interviews presented a problem. When it became impossible to gain access to the only available building in the settlement, the community hall, we had to resort to unconventional venues.

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The first interview was conducted in the university car, which we parked in the schoolyard. We had to interview the spaza shops' traders at their stalls, because they could not leave their stalls unattended. These interviews lacked privacy because they were conducted in the open, in full view of and amongst passers-by or customers coming to the spaza shops. As these spaza shops are situated on the open space next to the school, our presence also generated a lot of interest from the schoolchildren. Those who were interested would gather closer, would quietly listen in, and then move on.

An outflow of the location dilemma was that a collaborative spirit developed between the researchers and the community's women. The helpfulness of these women reflected in their willingness to share their scarce resources to make it easier or more comfortable for us to conduct these interviews. Given the scarcity of their resources we knew that it was a big sacrifice to part with even a plastic crate, as that was the only "chair" that the trader would sit on behind her counter. One of the women offered us the use of her low wooden bench, which she covered with a cloth. During the four interviews with these women, the three of us shared the bench, while the interviewee sat on a plastic crate. Our other interviews took place outside on the school's premises, or outside an interviewee's shack. Only towards the end of the interview phase did a storeroom become available at the school and we conducted the last three interviews there. The interviews that we conducted in the open were ones that we collected more detailed data from, because these interactions were opportunities to collect both interview and observational data.

The interviews with the spaza shop traders at their stalls were interrupted sporadically. For example, in between responding, the spaza trader would also attend to her stall and serve the odd customer. Katrina, one of the traders, would nurse her baby, and feed her other toddler sweets to keep him occupied, while calmly responding to our questions and also serving her young customers. During the interview we observed more than just a trader in action: we also saw a woman effectively attended to three roles simultaneously, namely that of trader, mother and caregiver. Another example of the richness of data collected during the interviews was our interview with Lettie, a homemaker. We interviewed her outside her very small corrugated iron shack because it was more convenient to do so. She told us that her baby was asleep in the shack, and that she was cooking. She would frequently get up from the crate and go into her shack to check on her food or to check in on the sleeping baby. These interruptions were not experienced as disturbances to the process; rather they served to illuminate the facts and significances of this woman's daily work bulk much better than her descriptions or renditions of information. Due to the informality of the setting, this scenario appeared auspicious and natural. The following observational notes are included to describe but one of the many similar events that also supports this theme.

> The little daughter has woken up, a chubby, chocolate girl dressed in a blue lace dress that is smeared with the yellow-orange of the corn chips she must have eaten. She is dead quiet on her mother's lap, summing us up. But just like her mother, her reserve melts as she becomes comfortable with having us in her territory. She starts grabbing the recorder, and pulling at her mother's ears and nose. Angela intervenes, and takes her from her mother, to take her for a stroll in the yard. She goes without any difficulty.

Reflecting on this interview, I wondered whether a male interviewer would have been as intuitive and comfortable with taking the child off her mother's arm? Would the mother have entrusted her child to a strange man as this woman was doing with Angela? Would a child have been as trustful as this one was with going to a stranger she saw for the first time that morning? Was it because we were all women, familiar with the "sites and activities" (Long, 1999, p. 46) that make up our lives, that everyone was doing these things so comfortably as if we had done it before? This dynamic kept on repeating itself in different ways, and the cooperative relationship that developed was interpreted as being the result of our usage of a feminist model of interviewing.

Photographs as windows to the community soul

During the interviews, we asked questions in an attempt to reconstruct life events. However, my assumptions about how lives are lived affected the type and focus of the questions I formulated. I juxtaposed collaboration and hierarchy with the process of research. Arvay (1998) points out the inequities of the research relationship: the researcher dictates the focus of the study, determines the research design, and assumes authorship of the data. My researcher's privilege had the potential to impact on the validity of the data as I determined the broader focus areas to be explored in the interviews. I used photography, as a first hand data collection method, to strengthen the validity of the data as well as to expand on the verbal dialogue that the

interviews initiated. This method situated the decision-making power with the subjects of a study. The women had control over which incidents and moments in their daily lives they wanted to record to share with us as personal visual commentaries on their private worlds. Photographs became a source richer in data than the interviews because they overrode linguistic constraints that some of the women had in expressing themselves. I gave each woman a disposable camera to record visual data of her environment, family, and life in Weiler's farm. I hoped to collect data that could expand on our understanding of the roles of women in these spheres, and to gage their visibility, strengths, and potentialities, but also their lack of power as individuals.

Analysing photographs could present the same interpretation problems one experiences during an interview. Similar to how we stand the chance of missing the finer nuances and meanings when we communicate through a second language, we could miss the drama, virtue, or bravery in people's lives when we analyse and interpret their photos without their input. To illustrate this point, I wish to share some of the women's analysis of their photos during the first workshop. The women engaged in an activity in which they had to discuss their photos within the context of community.

Mrs. George is a single, unemployed mother of nine children of which four were "inherited" when one of her sisters died. In the two years we worked in the community, another sister of Mrs. George died, leaving her to take in two more children. When I first analysed her photos, I was struck by how many of the 27 photos were of children. The others were of her sister's funeral. The children and death themes seemed to be logical evidence to back up similar themes that the interview data generated. She was very worried during the interview with how she was going to fend for all these children without an income. The first photo she showed around during this session was of her bathing a boy, who I had assumed was one of the eleven children. This was not so. Mrs. George told us that she found the child wandering in the streets and took him home with her. She bathed the boy, fed him, and provided shelter as well. The boy, who is disabled, stayed with her and her family for three months before relatives came to claim him back. Her second photo shows the boy still in his dirty clothing. She, herself, is the mother of a physically challenged little girl. She fondly spoke about the friendship that developed between the boy and her daughter in the three months that he lived with the family and attributed it to them having "something in common". She explained to us that the number of abandoned children in the community was growing at an alarming rate and that the community will have to take action to counter the phenomenon. The third photo she showed us was of a group of people surrounding a coffin. The photo was taken at Mrs. George's second sister's funeral. She said that the picture symbolised community to her because the people in that photo were members of the community of Westernaria who provided financial assistance to her to bury her sister. They also provided transportation to the funeral. Not once did she talk about the sadness of the occasion. Instead, she chose to focus on the goodwill expressed to her and the community's valuable support to her in times of crisis. Through the analysis of the photos, another dimension of this woman emerged: that of the humanitarian. She had the capacity to take in a child off the streets and share her minimal resources with a twelfth child. She made the comment that only when the community themselves get involved do changes take place. Her commentary that accompanied these photos resulted in data that provided quality information about her as a community builder who is civilly responsible as well.

The photo-analysis activity also shed light on coping mechanisms that some of the women use to deal with economic and social problems. Jeanette spoke about the picture of her dressed in a white Islamic outfit. She explained to us that many people in the community convert to Islam and Christianity because of economic hardship. They receive help in finding jobs through their involvement in the church or mosque; thus being able to feed their families. Her conversion was also a means of dealing with societal problems. According to her, going to the mosque helps her forget about her problems. She showed the group the picture of her two sons arriving home from madrassa, Islam's equivalent to the Christian institution of Sunday school. Jeanette encourages her sons to get involved in madrassa activities in an effort to steer them from engaging in criminal activities. Alina, one of the women in this group shed additional light on Jeanette's life in her choice of the photo of Jeanette's disabled husband. It was obvious that the women in this group know Jeanette's husband to be a difficult man with a very bad temper. Jeanette is the sole breadwinner and provider for her family, as her husband is paralysed. She supports them on the money she earns as a volunteer in the school-feeding program. This photo generated a lot of discussion around needed support for destitute families. Alina's empathy for Jeanette was clear when she suggested, " we should encourage people like Jeanette because giving each other support will help to alleviate the burden."

This exercise also provided opportunities for us to reflect on the impact our presence had in the community and on some of the women. Two of the women selected photos in which I was featured. During the

initial distribution of the cameras, we asked the recipient of the camera to take a photo of one of us to demonstrate knowledge of the procedure of operating a camera. Emily was not home when we delivered her camera, but her daughter and little son were. In her hand, she had the photo of her daughter, the little boy, and myself. She said that even though she is not on the photo, it is her most precious photo. That I had my hands on the shoulders of the boy in the photo showed her that I was honest in my interaction with them. She based this on her experience of white and coloured people as being racist and not touching black people because they look down on them. Rebecca held up a photo of herself and I in front of the makeshift shop.

> I love this photo. It shows love and concern. You did not say our spaza shops are dilapidated. You came, took photos of these, and motivated us to go on ourselves, to go on with our small businesses. This really shows that you care.

This response left me vulnerable and reflective of a change in my outsider status in the eyes of some of the women. It gave me a glimpse of how they perceive me. Physical outreach to the women and their families through touching and holding were perceived as more honest than the verbal contact we made, and the groceries we took as tokens of appreciation. This information made a difference to my interaction patterns as it sensitised me to the fact that I was part of their process of meaning making.

The women's analysis of their own photos shed light on more than just the visual images they captured; it also gave us insight into how they feel about community and what they do about it. Photographs became a powerful tool to use in the analysis of community dynamics as underlying currents are brought to the fore when everyday activities are captured on film. This was no more evident than when Maria, a 27-year old mother of three and a community leader showed me a photo that she took, on request by the boy next door, of a pigeon pen. She told us that the child wanted a photo of his pigeons in the safety of their pen, which was to be demolished soon. The family was moving soon, and the child was despairing about whether the doves were going to find a safe haven. "My neighbour's son loves doves. He asked me to take a photo of it so that he can remember he once had doves. Even they are lost when we move from here." Her comments were also a reflection of the displacement that many of the women felt when they first moved to Weiler's Farm and are again feeling due to the uncertainty about their moving into brick homes. Her commitment to civil responsibility came through very strongly in her choice of subject and her analysis of her photographs. Maria showed us a photo she took of an old woman outside a shack. She found the woman abandoned, and too frail to fend for herself. Maria took control of the situation, by taking her in, and arranging for her to be looked after till her death a few months later. Her second photo was of two babies, one her own and one the neighbour's. She took the photo to serve as a reminder to her son of where he comes from. But she also used it to comment on the rift between the community's women with the following comment: "My child and my neighbour's child join hands and live together. Can't we live together like these children?" She took photos of everyday activities such as the neighbour doing washing. "This photo will show where we come from – our children and grandchildren will see our history – seeing us doing washing in buckets." She was recording the history of Majanzane, the community's name for Weiler's Farm, for the children. She commented, "They should know where they came from to appreciate where they are moving to."

These photo commentaries gave us invaluable insights into important community activities as well as into how the women feel about these situations. The community's love of the land is not as easily observable due to the abject poverty; waste piling up in the open spaces, inaccessible dirt roads, and the abundance of stray dogs that confront the outsider on her visits. The women's reflections allowed us to get a sense of what people do to make their community liveable. It also made me see the community through a different lens when the community members showed photos of their gardens and talked about their love for animals. Rebecca showed a photo of her husband in their lush garden in a community where water is difficult to access. Katrina proudly showed us a photo of her chickens roaming freely in the yard, as the family does not have enough money to build a proper pen for them. Katrina's love of animals is clear in her comment about her not wanting to slaughter her chickens when its time. She loves the noise they make, and their activity in the yard reminds her of her youth. We experienced a brief encounter with a proud African farmer in this community of displaced peoples. I found photography to be a powerful tool to use in cross-cultural research as the medium allowed me to gain access to the world of the subjects in a more personal way, whilst still respecting their privacy. As a pedagogical tool the photos initiated much more valuable discussions on life in the settlement than the one-on-one interviews did.

Picture Drawings

A similar data collection method is drawing, which was used in collaboration with the photographs activity. While the verbal responses were directed to the questions asked by the interviewer, the drawings were freer from researcher influence. It was a mechanism that contributed to our insight into the women's ways of dealing with pertinent issues and their suggestions of solutions to some of these problems they are dealing with. The women were given photo-sized pieces of paper to make drawings of their interpretation of the concept, community, if they were not satisfied with the images depicted in the photo's they took. This was an optional exercise since the English literacy levels of the women vary from non-literate to semi-literate. Five of the nine women present engaged in this activity. Afterwards, she was invited to explain to the group what her drawing represented. The African woman as a lover of the land came through very strongly. It would seem as if they see farming as a way of addressing the poverty in their community. Though Rosina made a drawing of four people holding hands, the farmer was clearly identifiable in the person standing in front, holding a gardening tool. Also in the picture is a garden with different vegetables growing in it. Rosina's drawing is accompanied by the following message: *Kee nahana hore ha reka lema rajala dijo di ka thusa haholo ho sethaba. Ka hobane re tla kgona ho fa batho le ho lenja tjhelele ka malapeng wa rona.* [I think if we could plant vegetables they will help us a lot. Because we will be able to give some to people and also make money form some for our families.] Jeanette drew a picture of a garden, a house, and two cups (watering utensils). Her message, *U khu bambana Khuthle*, translates into working together, and unity being wonderful. Beauty's picture has a house, chicken, vegetables, a heart, and a women standing with her handbag hanging over her shoulder. Unlike the others, she did not write a message. She explained that her picture was about love. "We should boost each other, teach each other skills. For example, I know how to knit and Monica sewing. We should teach each other."

The theme of unity was present in all five drawings. Monica George made a picture of ten people holding hands in a circle. She also drew a heart. Like the others, her drawing had an accompanying message, which read, *Ubunye noku bambana* [unity and being there for each other]. Alina Mbokazi drew a school, with the sun shining over the school and children playing outside. She said that peace and unity in the community breeds a healthy environment for the kids to learn. Alina wrote, *Ke kopa re kopane*, which means, my request is that we should come together. This workshop took place at a time when there was unrest in the community. There was an unspoken plea for peace in this activity.

Findings

Housing represents permanency. Weiler's Farm's negotiations with the City of Johannesburg for permanency were lauded as a huge success because they were allocated land. However, since the building process started in 1999, it would appear as if the process is being derailed by miscommunication as well as a lack of transparency. During the interviews some women told us that the houses would be built and that they would be moved, section-by-section, to their new houses. However, as time passed, different stories started circulating, leading to confusion and anger. According to these women, the agreement was that the houses were to be built on the plots that they were currently living on. There was a lot of disappointment expressed in the counsellors' management of the process. They were apparently mismanaging development money, especially the donations made to the community. This situation has led to neighbours fighting amongst themselves. During the period we worked there, only four show houses were built. What started the dissatisfaction and fed the mistrust of sectors of the community was that roads are being built and electricity poles are being erected. Instead of welcoming this development, those desperate to own a house, see this as a betrayal of their trust. They think that the money allocated for their homes are now being used to finance these developments.

By the time we started the workshop preparations, which was a year later, the ongoing dispute over the housing development had turned ugly. Shacks were set alight, and people were arrested. Three of the subjects of the study were directly involved in this dispute. One subject spent two days in jail and was accused of inciting people to attack the opposition. She told us a few days prior to the workshop that the group, who is against moving, attacked the housing office and vandalised the building. This information was corroborated by the physical destruction we saw: all the windows were smashed and the office stripped bare of all furniture, other than for a metal desk that was too heavy to move. A second woman from this group was identified as the

ringleader of the unrest. We learnt that she was also arrested, and jailed. The third, elderly subject, who was a friend of the ringleader, had disappeared since the unrest. These two women did not attend any of the workshops even though we personally contacted them. We later found out that the other women, even those who were sympathisers of the cause, welcomed their absence.

Women building community in Weiler's Farm

It is difficult to facilitate workshops with women who are distrustful, even fearful of one another. The women have membership to elaborate networks and support systems such as church groups, funeral groups, Mogolisano (savings teams), and the ANC women's league. As these networks are based on trust, only very intimate friends are approached for membership, making them exclusive networks. The women are divided along political and ethnic lines. What contributes to the lack of unity is that three very strong, assertive women were central to many of the community issues; two of them were leaders of the different warring factions in the Weiler's Farm community. When we set up a meeting with all the women to make arrangements for the first workshop, there was lots of scepticism expressed about whether it will indeed take place. Those present were scared that fighting might break out between the women due to direct involvement with the community problems. However, they were also weary of the fighting and lawlessness of the preceding few weeks in which a family of five died when their shack was set alight. Seven of the women turned up for the meeting. One of the two identified leaders who was present, confirmed that there were problems, but also committed herself to the process. She said: "We do have differences but have no problem in meeting." Her commitment seemed to trigger the other's willingness to participate too. Comments such as: "We do have differences, but lets meet," and "let's meet and see if we can't forgive each other" we interpreted as signs of readiness to meet and work together. On the day of the workshop, only two women arrived on time. An hour later, another three joined us. It was clear that they were uncertain of whether they could in fact attend the workshop together. We decided to start the workshop when the headcount came to nine. Our objectives for the first workshop were for the women to get to know each other on a personal level and to learn to work together. Secondly, it was to diffuse a very volatile atmosphere that was weakening the fragile relationships that we had nurtured over the year. This workshop had to level the playing field and prepare the environment for constructive discussion to take place.

Like flies caught in the spider's web

Our first activity was an icebreaker that could reaffirm the physical and psychological links that Weiler's Farm's women share. For this activity, each woman received nine strings. For each link to be established each woman had to engage another woman in conversation. Once two women have established a connection, such as, for example sharing the same ethnicity or being a single mom, they knotted their individual strings together to form one string. Holding on to her end of the string, the woman then started with a new piece of string, moving to the next woman to establish a new link. Preferably, they had to make nine different links that bound them. This was to encourage them to engage in a probing process till they found commonalities between them. As the women were standing in a circle, these strings were becoming intertwined and later resembled a spider web of strings. The initial hesitancy and reserve to liase with the enemy camp soon disappeared, as the women became absorbed in the tasks at hand. They forgot about us as they started conversing in indigenous tongues and tying the knots. When the icebreaker ended, the strings resembled a web with the women entangled within and around. The symbolism of this web was not lost on these women, who said that they are all interwoven with the goings-on in the community, good, and bad. Our workshop got off to an excellent start with the women naming their links as women, single mothers, mothers of disabled children, politicians, and lovers of vegetable gardens. This activity succeeded in getting the message across that they had ties that bind them, many more than the differences that separate them. In the discussion that immediately followed, the women were willing to volunteer their views on community more freely. Maria stated that,

> ...community is the people. It is unity amongst people. If there are any differences amongst the people, these must be corrected because if not then fights and hatred extends to our own children. This is not wanted by us because community is peace.

Rebecca said that "...community is unity, peace and sharing what can build or develop our community. That is, developing our environment, like cleanliness. Developing clinics and schools makes for good community."

Katrina's contribution was: "Community is discussing unemployment; sharing how to live so that our children can survive. Sharing how to survive is community because if we do not share, we won't progress in these difficult times and our children will suffer." This web symbol also brought forth the images of women who are trapped by their circumstances and desperate to escape. They named unemployment, violence, crime, and abuse as factors that trap them and threaten the community's existence.

Divided and mistrustful: how can community be strengthened?

The women had to reflect on what makes it difficult to live within their community. We also asked them to analyse the factors that make community building a difficult process for them. To generate real issues and meaningful contributions, we divided into two groups instead of staying in the bigger group. This gave the women an opportunity to join forces with women they consider their allies, to give them the confidence to speak out, and to have their experiences validated by others. According to Alina, there is a lot of struggling for power or position going on at present. "We are forgetting that people's talents differ just as people differ, because of their uniqueness." Maria supported this statement. She added that inflexibility cause people to not accept the difference of others. "People are indeed unique. Other people do not forgive easily. Grudges are a problem." Monica elaborated on this conversation by remarking that Weiler's Farm people undermine each other. "For example when one comes up with an idea or suggestion, the others ask who is she/he to suggest. The Lord help us to build peace and unity in this community, if we want progress." They used hijacking as metaphor to explain how women undermine other women because of differing ethnicity or political affiliation. They also applied this to the current destruction of limited resources. There is ample evidence of recent incidents in which community members have responded in a very destructive manner by destroying shacks, removing electricity poles, and opposing the building of roads.

The women continued this process in smaller groups of three where they discussed events that happened, and how they as community members could resolve current problems in constructive ways. Each group worked with a facilitator who asked them to critique the methods that they use to address their community's problems. Then we asked them to generate alternative solutions and to think what these actions and attitudes look like in practice in this community. The outcomes of these discussions had to be visually demonstrated by the groups. We made use of people's theatre and role-play as a technique for them to act out their discussion process of the community problems. The three problems that were acted out reflected the issues that the women were presently experiencing: being disempowered by others, uncertainty about their housing, and internal fighting and mistrust in the community. The value of the role-plays was that many saw themselves through the eyes of others. Comments were that "one puts oneself in the problem situation but end up seeing both sides of the problem." They could critically reflect on their actions and gain clarity on whether their present stance on some community problems needs to be revisited and changed. We discussed how they could use this technique effectively within the community to resolve other issues.

The second and third workshops built on the first. The second workshop was on entrepreneurship and was better attended than the first. This workshop was aimed at the needs expressed by the four informal traders, but due to the community's high unemployment rate, it generated more interest. We had outside inquiries but decided to keep to our resolve to just workshop the subjects. During our pre-workshop meeting, Monica openly challenged me on the ground rules that we negotiated for participation in the workshops, because I had suggested that we throw the workshop open to other women too. She firmly reminded me that their needs might not be addressed if the workshop was opened up to other community members. The third workshop was on women's rights and health. The outcomes we envisaged was for them to analyse their situation and identify areas in which their rights are violated. Secondly, it was to determine ways of ensuring that their rights are upheld. Thirdly, it was for them to agree on ways to promote their rights as Weiler's Farm community women. The workshops' evaluation showed that the women realised the power of communication within the community and amongst themselves. Even if there are differences of perspectives, they realised the importance of giving each other a hearing and respecting each other's ideas. "There were misunderstandings between us as women. I would like to suggest that we should meet as women and share ideas, talk about the violence and conflicts before we meet with men."

Phampili, Mphakathi, Phampile: Forward, Community, Forward

The women saw many benefits to this dialectic process. When we brought the women together and facilitated the process, they exhibited a willingness to work together. Jeannette said: "We should help others and develop as people." We wish to meet as women and develop ourselves was a comment that resonated during the workshops. In the first workshop, some of the women for the first time spoke to their adversaries, or listened to their opinions. Alina was openly antagonistic towards Monica in the preparation sessions leading up to the workshops. She admitted to a change of perspective after the first activity:

> You brought peace within two groups. To be honest with you I never thought that I would ever forgive Monica George. But now we share ideas with one another and I found out that I am not the only one with a disabled child.

It is very important that women meet and share their experiences. This group of women was hungry for opportunities to exchange ideas, and gain knowledge about one another. Alina and Monica both are the mothers of disabled children, and only found that out during the workshop. The knowledge that they have something in common, seemed to trigger the realisation that there is value in knowing each other as women. Alina's son is severely disabled and caring for him is a full-time job for her. Monica, more than the others, related to what Alina is experiencing. The dialectic also had as a benefit the validation of personal experiences, and consequentially the personal empowerment of the subject, as was evident in Rosina's commentary:

> I am empowered to speak out and voice my ideas. My request is that women should be committed to development. The reason why our projects failed is that they were politically defined and we formed sub groups within. You encouraged us to speak and share ideas. We should continue to teach others, share with others.

During the course of the workshops, the women's confidence in their abilities grew and their attitudes underwent changes. By the time the women's rights workshop took place, women were listening and learning from each other. A shift in roles had also occurred. Whereas before there was a dependency on the facilitators, they now had accepted that the power lies within them to make a change to their community. When Rebecca said that she expected the gathering to increase their knowledge, Maria added, "knowledge to be independent." They expected the workshops to facilitate their working together so that they could teach others about development and facilitate progress in their community. Monica summarised this stance by stating, "Meeting as a group is a progressive activity and being together symbolises unity. If from this workshop we can do overt things, we have made progress." Emily suggested that they meet regularly under the guidance of Monica and Maria, "so that the community can see that the workshops were beneficial. Now we must act." The nomination of these two women was a defining moment, as these two women were from rival groups. There was unanimous support of her suggestion. This very simple sentence was reflective of how far the group had progressed. Even so, it was also the beginning of a new process. The challenge became how they, as a group, could ensure that they become a force and bring together the community. How could they ensure that the process that has started is going to continue? How could they take up the challenge as a group to translate the energy that was present into a force that could advance development? We asked them how they were going to solidify the relationship that had developed over the three workshops. The group endorsed Monica's response that,

> Love, trust and tolerance, women, can go very far. Lets be exemplary, Lets be strategic to realise aspirations and goals. Let's be equals. That is, let us be on the same wavelength: no-one superior, no-one inferior.

Impact

The two years that we worked in this community facilitated our understanding of one informal settlement's women efforts to navigate their environments. De Vault, in Sparks (1997) suggests the usage of familiar vocabulary, and listening "around and beyond words." Though we experienced that familiarity with the setting facilitated our understanding of the subjects, much more than familiarity was required. An understanding of and consideration for the women's workloads and roles definitely advanced collaboration between researcher and researched. I devoted a lot of space to women's work, because we saw women's work as a large part of the reality that shapes their subjectivity, a process that Long (1999) attributes to our gender. This model of

interviewing, which I define as a feminist model, because of its sensitivity to women's life contexts, narrowed the distance between the researchers and the researched women. It served to neutralize the unequal researcher-subject relationship, and made everyone involved, respond in much more natural ways.

The study's significance to the field of adult education in South Africa lies in its research design. Research in adult education in South Africa almost overwhelmingly excludes the voice of the participants. The focus tends to be on providers of literacy and the adult education programs, not on the subjects of such programs. With a narrative approach that incorporated multiple data collection methods, I was allowed, in my effort to understand the women's life histories, to go beyond the personal. Life histories of women community leaders who are living unsettled lives could expand feminist research on women who have been rendered invisible or marginal for not being of the dominant class, race, and culture. A secondary but important aspect of the process was that sisterhood, that is, the shared nature of women's experiences, was sought, reported on, and hopefully, advanced through this project. The beliefs, views, attitudes, and ways of thinking about inquiry that I held as a researcher were continuously being challenged by my work with these women. Reflexivity throughout the process became the trigger in transforming me from just a researcher into a narrator as well (Long, 1999). Though my schooling in methodology was useful in the planning stages of the project, once in the setting, they were found to not always be suited for the locations, nor user friendly to the researched, leading to the exploration of more realistic means of doing. Initial constraints became challenges, which became positives, in the sense that it required me to become innovative. It also encouraged the subjects to become involved as facilitators and collaborators of an ongoing process to bring about a better dispensation for themselves as women of Weiler's Farm. These skills were ones that they, as community women would find valuable in their efforts to challenge the problems that they are confronted with on a daily basis. Finally, working with and analyzing the present day struggles of Weiler's Farm's women led to the continuing maturation and growth of me as a woman and a researcher.

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